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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2008

In Today's Papers

May Day Marked by Police Brutality
All news outlets report police used excessive force to prevent Turkey's major labor unions and other civic organizations from commemorating May Day in Istanbul's Taksim Square yesterday. Police blocked access to Taksim Square by dispersing demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons. The headquarters of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions (DISK) was besieged by police, who fired teargas into the building where union members were meeting in preparation for the May Day events. Police fired teargas into a children's hospital near Taksim, which injured doctors and patients inside. As tensions escalated, DISK cancelled their march to Taksim. DISK's May Day march was intended to commemorate the 36 people killed in May Day in 1977. Papers report DISK chairman Suleyman Celebi said they decided not to march to Taksim in order to minimize damage, and Celebi demanded the resignation of Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler. Celebi said the police brutality on May Day revealed the hypocrisy of the AKP, and it also showed that "the government wants freedom only for the headscarf." The ruling AKP government imposed a ban on May Day celebrations in Taksim Square, claiming illegal groups were planning to use the rally to cause civil unrest. At least 25,000 policemen were on duty and 2,000 gendarmes were stationed in Taksim Square at 4:30 in the morning yesterday. Papers report 530 demonstrators were detained, and 6 policemen and 32 civilians injured.

Mainstream Milliyet's banner headline reads, "Why?" and argues, "The Government Stirs Up Tensions While the Police Beat Men and Women With Batons and Kicks," as "Even a Hospital Is Attacked With Teargas." Mainstream Hurriyet writes in "May Day Police State," that, "Workers in cardigans were dispersed by police using water cannons, teargas, and truncheons." Hurriyet also notes, "Police did not hesitate to use teargas in a children's hospital," where "both doctors and patients were hurt." Liberal Radikal carries photos of police beating May Day protestors with the banner headline, "This Is As Far As AKP Democracy Goes;" the article points out, "Police started their security measures with early morning beatings."

Radikal columnist Murat Yetkin calls the police crackdown, "a violation of international conventions," and notes, "the AKP government upholds EU values in its defense against closure, but acts like a Middle East autocracy when the rights of workers are at stake." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes, "May Day Marred By AKP Terror," as "The government's mask of democracy is removed," and "the police take orders from the government to turn Istanbul into a battle field," as, "a reporter for Cumhuriyet suffers a broken arm after being beaten by police." Cumhuriyet also writes, "May Day was celebrated in 160 countries but footage of police at May Day rallies in Turkey must have looked like some kind of police festival." Cumhuriyet correspondent Orhan Bursali called yesterday's turmoil, "a rehearsal for the establishment of an Islamic dictatorship." Mainstream Vatan columnist Rusen Cakir writes, "When the government banned the May Day demonstrations, they missed a chance to improve dialogue with voters who did not support them in the last elections." Economic daily Referans refers to Istanbul Police Chief Celalettin Cerrah's statement that "the police fulfilled their duties," by saying, "Cerrah must have been blinded by the teargas used by the police yesterday." Columnist Mehmet Altan of mainstream Star wrote, "Yesterday's clashes looked like the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in Turkey." Mainstream Sabah strikes an ironic tone, saying "Police and soldiers have bravely defended Taksim from the workers."

Meanwhile, Islamist-oriented and far right papers report otherwise. Islamist-oriented Zaman writes, "Taksim Tensions Averted When Labor Unions Step Back," but that "tensions were triggered by marginal groups clashing with police." Conservative, nationalist-oriented Bugun writes, "May Day Horror: All of Turkey Pays for DISK's Insistence on Marching to Taksim." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes, "The Result of DISK's Insistence on Marches in Taksim:

ANKARA 00000853 002 OF 004

Police Use Teargas and Water Cannons Against the Demonstrators." Conservative-nationalist Turkiye writes, "Provocation! Demonstrators Trigger Turmoil With Their Insistence on Marching to Taksim, Despite the Restrictions." Ali Bayramoglu of Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak blames the overall mentality of intolerance on both sides, noting Turkish politics are "haunted by oriental despotism." However, columnist Oktay Eksi of mainstream Hurriyet joined the criticism against the labor unions when he wrote, "The unions pretended they were too strong to listen to the laws."

President Abdullah Gul expressed regret that the workers could not celebrate May 1 by exercising basic rights and freedoms. The CHP deputy group chairmen released a statement saying the AKP handled May Day with a "fascist mentality." Far right MHP deputy group chairmen held a joint press conference and denounced the attitude of the security forces that were acting on the orders of the government.

Editorial Commentary on Yesterday's May Day Debacle

"Was This About May Day or the Government's Hara-kiri Suicide?" Cengiz Candar wrote in business daily Referans (5/2): "The police's show of force against demonstrators and the government's fights with labor unions are enormously symbolic events. After yesterday's debacle, these symbols may signal the final stage of the AKP government. Yesterday's May Day crackdown was typical of a despotic government with no sense of freedom. If this is the way AKP wants to behave, Turkey has no need for it. While the measures taken to prevent labor unions from entering Taksim Square were legal, these measures were not taken in the interest of freedom."

"The September 12 Coup Is Still Alive"

Koray Duzgoren wrote in Islamist Yeni Safak (5/2): "While watching yesterday's scenes from Taksim, foreigners must wonder if Turkey is experiencing another military coup. Police forces harshly attacked demonstrators and, in some cases, even innocent bystanders. Turkey's September 12th military coup happened 27 years ago, but today the same mentality of intolerance continues. One can exercise his or her freedoms only up to a certain extent. In fact, the government's justification for the crackdown is even the same as it was during the military coup - full scale freedom can be abused."

There is only one difference between military despotism and today. The military used to declare curfews on May Day. While there are no official curfews today, it is a de facto thing."

"Reporting From Besieged Taksim"

Ferai Tinc wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (5/2): "Interestingly enough, the closure case against the AKP was opened based on existing laws. When the closure case was initiated, AKP leaders extensively challenged the validity of the law. But when it comes to labor unions and May Day demonstrations, the ruling AKP presents a stiff approach to binding laws. This is nothing but hypocrisy and self-serving democracy. While party closure is not right, banning peaceful demonstrations is equally wrong. The values of democracy should be embraced as a whole. Unions planned to criticize the government's approach to labor rights and the AKP prevented their voices from being heard from Taksim. Yet this does not help the ruling AKP at all. Instead, the entire world now understands the true meaning of democracy according to the AKP."

[Background: May Day was a national holiday until the 1980 military coup. Prior to the 1980 coup, labor unions traditionally organized large gatherings in Istanbul's Taksim Square. In 1977, May Day Celebrations ended in bloodshed when 36 died after someone opened fire on the crowd of 500,000. Later, papers reported the so-called "Deep State" was involved in the violence and thus it was an act of provocation. The military coup of 1980 ordered a full ban on May Day celebrations and annulled the May Day holiday.]

ANKARA 00000853 003 OF 004

Turkish Delegation Holds Official Talks in Iraq

All papers report on Thursday, a Turkish delegation led by Prime Minister Erdogan's chief advisor Professor Ahmet Davutoglu and Special Iraq envoy Ambassador Murat Ozelik met with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, and the Kurdish regional administration Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. During the meeting with the Iraqi President, Talabani said it was "important for Turkey to strengthen ties with not only the central Iraqi government but also the Kurdish administration." A statement issued by the Iraqi Presidency said the delegations stressed the need to resolve matters between Turkey and the Kurdish administration, and hold talks on politics, economics, and security matters.

In the meeting with the Turks, Prime Minister Maliki said Iraqi government was eager to boost relations with Turkey and improve cooperation in all areas. While Maliki said this year would be a year of reconstruction in Iraq, he added he would like to see Turkey join the reconstruction projects. Davutoglu reaffirmed Turkey's support to Iraq's fight against terrorism and projects to reconstruct the country. Davutoglu also told Maliki that Prime Minister Erdogan was willing to visit Iraq, say papers.

In Ankara, Prime Minister Erdogan met Thursday the Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi. Erdogan and Hashimi to discuss regional stability and cooperation in the fight against terrorism and. Earlier yesterday, Hashimi was received by President Abdullah Gul at Cankaya Presidential Palace. Gul said energy was an important dimension of Turkey's ties with Iraq. Gul also told Hashimi Turkey wants to be included in the new list of countries that would explore oil in Iraq, papers report. Mainstream Sabah reports, "Turkish officials asked Kurdish officials to guarantee they will take action against the PKK," and "the political isolation of northern Iraq will continue if the Kurdish regional administration fails to take steps against the PKK."

MHP Seeks CHP Support for Annulling Changes in Article 301

Hurriyet and Sabah report that MHP deputy chairmen Oktay Vural and Mehmet Sandir met with CHP group deputy chairmen Kemal Anadol, Kemal Kilicdaroglu and Hakki Suha Okay in an effort to get CHP's support to take the amendment of article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code to the Constitutional Court. Sabah reports that CHP stressed that it was not possible to appeal to the Constitutional Court for the annulment of changes in article 301.

Six Children on Trial for Singing Kurdish Marches

Mainstream Sabah and Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak report the

Diyarbakir Juvenile Court is trying six children between the ages of 14 and 15 on charges of making PKK propaganda at a music festival in the U.S. The lawyers of the child defendants claim the song the children sang and the flags that were hanging at the concert hall all belong to the regional Kurdish administration of northern Iraq. In order to gather more evidence, the court board postponed the case.

TV Highlights
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- Turkish fighter jets have bombed the PKK positions in the Kurtek and Kalatukan regions in Mount Kandil in northern Iraq.
- Investigations into a recent lynching attempt against Kurds in Adapazari continue, but ten suspects detained in connection to the crime were released. A group of Kurds in Sakarya condemned the racist attacks in the city.
- Turkish Parliament's Justice Committee approved Thursday a draft allowing foreigners to acquire property in Turkey. On March 12, the Constitutional Court annulled a law on sales of real estate to

ANKARA 00000853 004 OF 004

foreign companies and joint ventures.

International News

- Greek Cypriot leader Christofias said new initiatives in Cyprus would not lead to peace if Turkish Cypriots base their positions on the views of the Turkish National Security Council (MGK).
- Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki sent a delegation to tell Iran to stop backing the Shiite militias in Iraq.
- The man believed to be the head of al-Qaeda in Somalia was killed in a U.S. air strike.

WILSON